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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [MOPS](#) [RS](#) [GG](#)
SUBJECT: GEORGIA: UNOMIG OBSERVES SNIPER PATROL IN ABKHAZIA

Classified By: Ambassador John F. Tefft for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C/NF) Summary and comment. On January 22 a UN Observer Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG) patrol in Abkhazia saw seven individuals in unmarked camouflage patrolling near the village of Gvashigverdi, just inside the administrative boundary. Among other weapons, the group carried three SVD sniper rifles. Local villagers said the soldiers were Russian and are seen frequently in the area. Georgian forces in nearby Pakhulani, across the boundary, had concerns about snipers in December and restricted their movements for fear of attacks, and a UNOMIG patrol was threatened by an Abkhaz soldier in the same area January 16. Georgian officials have informed us about sniper attacks on Georgian forces along the administrative boundaries of both Abkhazia and South Ossetia, sometimes with the use of specialized sniper rifles, but this is the first instance known to us in which international monitors have observed militia carrying such weapons. End summary and comment.

¶2. (C/NF) While on patrol in the Gali sector on January 22, a UNOMIG patrol came across a foot patrol consisting of seven individuals wearing mismatched, unmarked camouflage uniforms. An American member of the UNOMIG patrol (please protect) explained that mismatched camouflage uniforms generally indicate Abkhaz militia, but he observed that none of the individuals had typical Caucasian features. Local villagers later told the UNOMIG patrol that the soldiers were Russian and frequently patrolled the area. The American officer saw the foot patrol carrying three SVD sniper rifles, as well as one PKM machine gun and at least two AK-47 or -74 assault rifles. The UNOMIG patrol also observed a Russian armored vehicle in the same area. The official report of the incident does not mention the specific weapons observed, nor does it speculate on the origin of the members of the foot patrol (see paragraph 4).

¶3. (SBU) On December 19, 2008, a UNOMIG patrol met with Georgian Interior Ministry officials based near Pakhulani, directly across the administrative boundary from Gvashigverdi (both villages are north of the Enguri River). They informed UNOMIG that they had stopped patrolling in the area because of recent shooting incidents and recommended that UNOMIG likewise refrain from patrolling the area for fear of snipers. On January 16, 2009, a UNOMIG patrol near Tkaia, just south of Gvashigverdi (on the other side of both the administrative boundary and the Enguri River), while observing an Abkhaz post, heard approximately 15 shots from a machine gun on the Abkhaz side of the boundary. Although the patrol could not determine the exact source of the firing, one Abkhaz soldier at the post shouted and another pointed his weapon at the patrol.

¶4. (SBU) The following passage appears in the January 23 Daily UNOMIG SitRep from Special Representative Verbeke to Le Roy, UN, New York (reporting on the events of January 22):

-- At GVASHIGVERDI, patrol observed 1 X BTR-80 and 7 armed soldiers on foot (origin unidentified) conducting patrol. Local resident said such patrols carried out regularly.
TEFFT